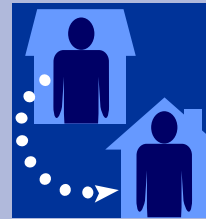


SIPP Sample Design and Interview Procedures




This section provides basic information about the organizing principles of SIPP, sample selection, and SIPP's interview procedures.

- *Organizing Principles*
- *Selection of Sampling Units*
- *Oversampling*
- *Identifying Sample Members*
- *Interview Procedures*
- *Following Rules*
- *Nonresponse*


Organizing Principles

Panels. SIPP is a longitudinal sample that is administered in panels; each panel comprises a new sample. The early panels varied in length from 12 to 32 months. The 1996 Panel length was 4 years. Subsequent panels will be 3 years in length.

Waves. Within a SIPP panel, the entire sample is interviewed at 4-month intervals. These groups of interviews are called waves.

Rotation Groups. Sample members of each panel are divided into four subsamples of roughly equal size; each subsample is referred to as a rotation group. One rotation group is interviewed each month. 

Reference Months. During the interview, information is collected about the previous 4 months, which are referred to as reference months or the reference period. Because one rotation group is interviewed each month, the reference period is a different calendar period for each rotation group. [Link to a table that illustrates these variations.](#)

Most data are collected for each of the 4 months in the reference period. Some data, however—particularly topical module data—are collected on a weekly resolution or for some other time period. 

SIPP

Because some of the early panels had waves with fewer than four rotation groups, some topical information is not available for the full sample and the length of time an analyst can follow adults from the original sample is reduced for selected rotation groups.

To ascertain correct reference periods, analysts need to become familiar with the questionnaire and skips in the questionnaire for each wave. This task is more difficult when working with the CAI instrument introduced in the 1996 Panel. For CAI instruments, SIPP screen books are available to help users discern the meaning of an item, but not its path logic.

Selection of Sampling Units

The Census Bureau employs a two-stage sample design to select the SIPP sample:

1. Selection of primary sampling units (PSUs)—The frame consists of U.S. counties and independent cities, along with population counts and other data for those units from the most recent census of population.
2. Selection of address units within sample PSUs—Five separate, non-overlapping frames are used: a unit area frame, a group quarters frame, a housing unit coverage frame, a coverage improvement frame, and a new-construction frame.

In SIPP, a housing unit is defined as living quarters with its own entrance and cooking facilities. The five frames include units such as residential houses, apartments, boarding houses, hotel rooms, and other housing-unit institutions such as convents and monasteries. *tip*

Oversampling

To allow analysts to conduct meaningful analyses of the low-income population, the Census Bureau oversampled low-income strata in the 1990 Panel and, beginning with the 1996 Panel, will regularly do so. *tip*

Identifying Sample Members

Original Sample Members. To identify sample members within selected address units, Census Bureau interviewers:

- **Compile** a roster for each sampled household, listing all people living or staying at the address
- **Identify** those who are household members by determining if the address is their usual residence
- **Designate** all people who are considered members as original sample members

SIPP *tip*

Because of SIPP's complex sampling scheme, software packages that assume simple random sampling for variance estimation will underestimate the true standard errors of SIPP estimates. (Link to the section on Sampling Error in this tutorial.)

tip

Analysts who are using entire samples in any panels with oversampling will need to use weights in their analyses to redress the imbalance caused by the oversampling (see Chapter 8 of the SIPP Users' Guide).

Other Sample Members. When original sample members move into households with other individuals not previously in the survey, the new individuals become part of the SIPP sample for as long as they continue to live with an original sample member.

Similarly, when new individuals move in with original sample members after the first interview, they too become part of the SIPP sample for as long as they continue to live with an original sample member.

The image shows a screenshot of a computer screen displaying the U.S. Census Bureau SIPP Core Content form. The header is blue with 'U.S. Census Bureau' in yellow and 'Core Content' in white. To the right is a blue box with 'SIPP' in white. Below the header, the text 'RPNAME' is followed by a question: 'What are the names of all persons living or staying here? Start with the name of the person, or one of the persons, who owns or rents this home. Please include middle and maiden names. PRESS ENTER IF NO MIDDLE OR MAIDEN NAME'. At the bottom, it says 'FIRST NAME @'.

Interview Procedures

At Wave 1, interviews are attempted for all eligible members of the housing units who are at least 15 years old. When an interview cannot be conducted with an eligible member because the person is absent or incapable of responding, SIPP will accept a proxy interview, usually with another household respondent.

In subsequent waves, interviewers update their housing rosters:

- They list all eligible household members, including anyone who may have joined the household, and they record the dates of entry for anyone new to the household. *tip*
- They note people who left the household and the dates on which they left. Interviewers attempt to obtain the new addresses of original sample members.

SIPP *tip*

Key to SIPP data collection is identification of a household reference person, an owner or renter of record. The interviewer lists other people in the household according to their relationship to the reference person. The identification of the household reference person, and thus the household description, can change from month to month.

Following Rules

SIPP is a person-based sample. Interviewers attempt to follow original SIPP sample members who move, provided they do not move abroad or into institutions or military barracks.

Except for Waves 4+ of the 1993 Panel (when all original sample members and their newly born children were followed), the SIPP following rules designate that only sample members who are 15 years of age or older should be followed if they move.

If original sample members move more than 100 miles from a designated SIPP primary sampling unit, interviewers may attempt to reach them by phone. *tip*

[Link to an illustration of SIPP's following rules.](#)

Nonresponse

SIPP, like all other longitudinal surveys, experiences non-response as well as sample attrition. The Census Bureau uses various methods to compensate for bias that might arise because nonrespondents differ from survey respondents on the survey variables.

Household Nonresponse. The Census Bureau distinguishes primarily between Type A and Type D household non-response. Type A nonresponse occurs when the interviewer locates the household but cannot interview any adult household members. Type D nonresponse occurs when original sample members move to an unknown address or to a non-interviewable address (the new address is located more than 100 miles outside a SIPP sampling area and telephone interview is not possible). Type D nonresponse applies only to Wave 2 and beyond.

SIPP *tip*

An important difference exists between a mover and a person who is temporarily away. A mover no longer lives at the sample address. A person is temporarily away if the household is the person's usual place of residence and he or she is free to return at any time—for example, a college student living on campus with a room held at home.

Person Nonresponse. There are two forms of person-level, or Type Z, nonresponse:

- A sample person was in the household during part (or all) of the reference period and was part of the household on the date of the interview but refused to answer, or was not available for the interview and a proxy interview was not obtained.
- A person was part of the household during part of the 4-month reference period but then moved and was no longer a household member on the date of the interview. *tip*

Item Nonresponse. Item nonresponse occurs when a respondent does not answer one or more questions, even though most of the questionnaire is completed. Item nonresponse can also occur during the postinterview data editing process if respondents provide inconsistent information or an interviewer incorrectly records a response.

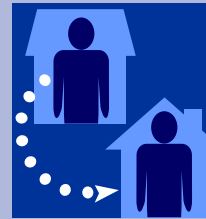
SIPP *tip*

Although household nonresponse is usually handled by weighting adjustments, person-level nonresponse is handled by imputation.

SIPP Survey Content

This section provides an overview of the SIPP survey instrument and its content.

- *SIPP Interview*
- *Core Content*
- *Topical Content*



SIPP Interview

With the 1996 Panel, interviewers began using laptop computers, rather than paper instruments, to collect SIPP survey data. Computer-assisted interviewing (CAI) has several advantages, but also one major disadvantage:

Advantages of CAI

- More of the core content from prior waves can be referenced in each interview.
- Responses and complicated logic from one part of the interview can be used in subsequent parts, allowing automatic checks for consistency and accuracy while the interviewer is in contact with the household.
- Certain decisions about which questions to ask, whom to ask, and so forth, are programmed rather than left to interviewer discretion.
- Survey elements appear seamless to both the interviewer and the respondent because automated skip patterns have replaced written instructions. *tip*

Disadvantage of CAI

- It is difficult for an analyst to understand the logical flows of the instrument. SIPP screen books are available to help users discern the meaning of an item, but they do not help with path logic.

Interviewers collect information on core items, which remain constant from one wave to the next, and on topical items, which do not appear in every wave.

SIPP *tip*

Users will probably find that certain data are more consistent across waves in the 1996 Panel than in earlier panels because of automatic data checks with CAI.



The Census Bureau interviewer first completes or updates a roster listing all household members, verifies basic demographic information, and checks certain facts about the household. The CAI instrument performs case-management functions for these data; previously, this information was recorded on control cards.

Respondents are asked to refer to records whenever possible, and interviewer probes ensure that reported earnings and income amounts are reasonable.

Core Content

Core questions, which collect critical labor force, income, and program participation data, are asked in every wave. The 1996 Panel and prior panels covered the same content, for the most part, although the questions were grouped differently:

1996 Panel

Earnings and employment
Program, general, and asset income
Additional questions

Pre-1996 Panels

Labor force and reciprocity
Earnings and employment
Amounts of income received
Program questions

Questions on employment and earnings address topics such as:

- Respondent's labor force status for each week of the reference period
- Characteristics of employers
- Self-employment

Section 1 - LABOR FORCE AND RECIPENCY

SHOW FLASHCARD J!

1. During the 4-month period outlined on this calendar, that is, from 6 months ago through (last month), did ... have a job or business, either full time or part time, even for only a few days? Mark "Yes" for active duty in the Armed Forces, any temporary or part-time work, and work without pay in a family business or farm.

1000 ☐ Yes - Mark "Worked" (code 170) on ISS and SKIP to 4
1001 ☐ No

2a. Even though ... did not have a job during this period, did ... spend any time looking for work or on layoff from a job?

1002 ☐ Yes
1003 ☐ No - SKIP to 3a

b. Please look at the calendar. In which weeks was ... looking for work or on layoff from a job? Please answer by giving the week number that appears to the right of each week on the calendar. Mark (X) all that apply.

1004 ☐ ALL

1005 ☐ 1 1006 ☐ 2 1007 ☐ 3 1008 ☐ 4 1009 ☐ 5 1010 ☐ 6 1011 ☐ 7 1012 ☐ 8 1013 ☐ 9 1014 ☐ 10 1015 ☐ 11 1016 ☐ 12 1017 ☐ 13 1018 ☐ 14 1019 ☐ 15 1020 ☐ 16 1021 ☐ 17 1022 ☐ 18

c. Could ... have taken a job during any of those weeks if one had been offered?

1042 ☐ Yes - SKIP to 3a
1043 ☐ No

d. What was the main reason ... could not take a job during those weeks? Mark (X) only one.

1044 ☐ Already had a job
1045 ☐ Temporary illness
1046 ☐ School
1047 ☐ Other - Specify

3a. Even though ... did not have a job during this period, did ... do any work at all that earned some money?

1048 ☐ Yes - Mark "SS" on ISS
1049 ☐ No - SKIP to 3a, page 4

b. In which of the months shown on this calendar did ... do that work? Mark (X) all that apply.

1050 ☐ Last month
1051 ☐ 2 months ago
1052 ☐ 3 months ago
1053 ☐ 4 months ago

4. Did ... have a job or business, either full or part time, during EACH of the weeks in this period? Note that the person did not have to work each week.

1054 ☐ Yes
1055 ☐ No - SKIP to 6a

5a. Was ... absent without pay from ...'s job or business for any FULL weeks during the 4-month period?

1056 ☐ Yes
1057 ☐ No - SKIP to 6a, page 4

b. Please look at the calendar. In which weeks was ... absent without pay? Please answer by giving the week number that appears to the right of each week on the calendar. Mark (X) all that apply.

1058 ☐ ALL

1059 ☐ 1 1060 ☐ 2 1061 ☐ 3 1062 ☐ 4 1063 ☐ 5 1064 ☐ 6 1065 ☐ 7 1066 ☐ 8 1067 ☐ 9 1068 ☐ 10 1069 ☐ 11 1070 ☐ 12 1071 ☐ 13 1072 ☐ 14 1073 ☐ 15 1074 ☐ 16 1075 ☐ 17 1076 ☐ 18

c. What was the main reason ... was absent without pay from ...'s job or business during those weeks? Mark (X) only one.

1077 ☐ On layoff
1078 ☐ Own illness
1079 ☐ On vacation
1080 ☐ Bad weather
1081 ☐ Labor dispute
1082 ☐ New job to begin within 30 days
1083 ☐ Other - Specify

SKIP to 6a, page 4

NOTES

- A business owned by the respondent and whether the respondent is active in its management, owns it as an investment, or does some of both
- Earnings from either jobs or self-employment
- Unemployment compensation during the reference period
- Time spent looking for work
- Moonlighting
- Employment situation for up to two jobs and two businesses



Questions on program, general, and asset income address topics such as:

- Benefits or income from programs such as Social Security, Food Stamps, and General Assistance
- Retirement, disability, and survivor's income
- Unemployment insurance and workers' compensation
- Severance pay
- Lump-sum payments from pension or retirement plans
- Child support
- Alimony payments
- Assets—401(k) plans, stocks, rental property, and the like

Additional questions cover the following kinds of topics:

- Health insurance ownership and coverage
- Educational assistance
- Energy assistance
- School lunch program participation
- Subsidized housing



Topical Content

Topical questions are not repeated in each wave, and their frequency and timing vary.

Topical questions sometimes appear in separate topical modules that follow the core questions; at other times they are placed with core questions that relate to the same topic. The term topical module, therefore, refers to all topical items of the same theme, instead of those that are grouped into a distinct module.

Reference periods for items in topical modules vary widely, ranging from the respondent's status at the time of the interview to the respondent's experience over his or her entire life. Analysts should check question wording carefully to ascertain the reference period for a particular topical question.

Analysts also need to check the universe for each topical question because topical modules are not uniformly asked of all respondents. **tip**

The large number of topical modules that have appeared in SIPP panels can be grouped under the following broad themes:

- Health, disability, and physical well-being
- Financial
- Child care and financial support

SIPP *tip*

Over time, topical module content may have changed with no change in title, or the title may have changed with little change in content. Sometimes, content has “floated” from one topical module to another. Significant overlap in content may exist between two topical modules with different titles.

- Education and employment
- Family and household characteristics and living conditions
- Personal history
- Welfare reform

Information on specific topical modules and the panels and waves in which they have appeared is available in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 of the *SIPP Users' Guide*.